

[Gussie Simon]

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER ARNOLD MANOFF

ADDRESS 27 Hamilton Terrace

DATE Sept. 20, 1938

SUBJECT YIDDISH FOLK SONGS—ANECDOTES & TALES (GUSSIE SIMON

1. Date and time of interview Sept. 19, 1938/Oct. 11 and 17th
2. Place of interview 2094 Creston Ave. Bronx N. Y.
3. Name and address of informant Gussie Simon 2094 Creston Ave.
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Three room apt. on ground floor. Middle class residential neighborhood. Apartment simply furnished. A little bare. Picture of Beethoven over old piano. Many plants on the window

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sills. No stuffed furniture as is common in the homes in this neighborhood. A sparse but clean atmosphere.

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FORM B Personal History of Informant

STATE NEW YORK

NAME OF WORKER ARNOLD MANOFF

ADDRESS 27 Hamilton Terrace

DATE Sept. 20, 1938

SUBJECT YIDDISH FOLK SONGS—ANECDOTES & TALES (GUSSIE SIMON)

1. Ancestry Russo - Jewish
2. Place and date of birth Born in little village in Russia some 55 years ago. Some 30 years in America
3. Family
4. Places lived in, with dates
5. Education, with dates
6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates
7. Special skills and interests

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8. Community and religious activities

9. Description of informant

Well preserved rather stout woman. Sad deeply lined face. Speaks English with an accent but very well.

10. Other Points gained in interview

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FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE NEW YORK

NAME OF WORKER Arnold Manoff

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SUBJECT YIDDISH-FOLK-SONGS—ANECDOTES & TALES (GUSSIE SIMON)

Informant gave the following songs. She understood immediately the kind of material wanted and patiently searched her memory. It was easiest for her to remember songs of a folk quality. The melodies in most cases were very difficult for her to recall. Those which she could not remember she recited giving the rhythm. Was unable to get the melodies at this interview but have arranged to come back to get them and thus also give her the opportunity to recall them. These are Yiddish songs dating around 1905. Informant tells

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that they were widely sung on the East Side and that they originated in the shops and the homes of the Jewish community at that time.

This is a song about the Williamsburg bridge. Supposed to have originated through the reaction of the community to the tearing down of buildings to make way for the bridge.

(verse) I used to know a street She was with all the streets alike Now have they her
ashamed They have from her taken down a side.

(refrain to the tune of "Tammany")

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(verse) - continued Delancy Street. Delancy Street Sasha, Masha, borscht and kasha —
East Broadway — (borscht is beet soup — kasha is porridge) This is a song about Hester
Park sung around 1905. Jenny the Red and Hyman Isaac, Big Shot Going marriage
to have Mondy in the morning. The marriage will be in the beautiful Hester Park The
marriage performer will be an Irishman And the canopy will be held by Negroes four. And
Vanderbilt himself will also there be — He will sit on top near by the door. And Sonia
Shapiro will be the Reverend And Hyman Isaac with his band Will play on a stand — Let
be with luck. 3 Work song of the needle trades—originated in the days of the sweat shops

Forward run the machines. Dirty is in shop and hot. And from the brow sees one running
Thick drops of sweat. Quickly move themselves-the wheels And the work quickly And an
each one sings a little song At his sewing machine.

(chorus) You little wheels; you turn yourselves — You little bosses; you joy yourselves —
And we poor working people — We die before the time.

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Work song dating around 1905 in the needle trades Sits a tailor and sews and sews And has kaduhkis He sews and sews a whole week And has kaduhkis He sews and sews a whole week Earns a gulder with a hole. Like this sews a tailor. Like this makes he stitches.

(The word kaduhkis has no English equivalent. It means many things in Yiddish. Kaduhkis was the term given by Russian Jews to a sickness with the symptoms of malaria, a sickness which was not a sickness. General use of the word is to describe something odious which has no value, no meaning. A sort of rotten nothingness.)

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In speaking, the informant spoke both Yiddish and English. I have tried to take down both languages. In the Yiddish portions of the interview there will occur first the Yiddish and then after each sentence or paragraph, as the case may be, I will follow with a literal rather than a literary translation in parenthesis. I have made no attempt to denote the informant's pronunciation as it was only slightly foreign.

Where my mother lives, so there is a pantry there, because it is an old private house. So they are holding all kinds of things that shouldn't be in the house like mine for Passover and a little schnappes. They have to keep it in the pantry because it is cooler. All kinds of things, wines and jams. She has the pantry locked for strangers not to take out things. So my father had to go to get there something he asked her for the key. So he says to her (Give me the key for the dispensary) Pantry, dispensary, it's all the same to him. You know where my mother lives the woman who owns the house she is poor and she hangs on to the home because it is her living. A couple, a blind woman and her husband that comes once in a while there. She is one of the tenants there in that house. Her husband, they say it is her sweetheart, what difference does it make? And while the woman who is the landlady went away to shul, it was Yom Kippur so the husband watched where she put the rent money and he took it. So they blamed him and he said he didn't do it and he ran

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away. So the woman who is blind she pleaded with him they should not make a fuss, over it and she would pay them three dollars a week.

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(You need this all to write?) All the lousy things?

(What one Jew stole from another one money Yom Kippur at night?)

It put us in a bad light. I'll give you a nice story about us, no I won't make it up. They tell a story, an old one, maybe my great grandmother even from her grandmother. You have to call this story (The Rabbi from the little town, Yom Kippur at night) You could make a real nice story out of it.

(Everybody had come earlier from the work. All the stores were closed. Everybody had washed themselves and put on their Saturday clothes.) You don't have to know which town. That story could happen in any town. So also the women after they had a day's hard work preparing for the Yuntif (holiday) they were tired out; 7 they had to go to shul that night too because it was the holiest night in the year. If a woman had a baby the eldest children used to watch the baby because she had to go to shul. If there was no other children she had to call in from the neighbor and sometimes they even left the baby alone. So everybody went to shul and while they were in shul they were all waiting for the Rabbi. The women were in the women's department of the shul on the gallery and the men were downstairs. They were all-waiting for the Rabbi to begin (praying) and of course that night was very holy and (they all went with trepidation, with fear in heart that God should forgive them and everybody wished each other well.) Oh you could make a beautiful story from this.

(The night before Yom Kippur! This is a wonderful experience) And so everybody gathered and there is this feeling. They are all together and they are waiting for the Rabbi.

(And they wait and they wait and it becomes late and the Rabbi is not here)

(It was decided to send a young boy to find out what had happened to the Rabbi. And the young boy found nobody in the house. The Rabbi's wife was also in the Synagogue and the young boy came back and said that the Rabbi is not in the house. Became the people frightened and let themselves out over the town to look for the Rabbi and in the meantime it had become late and it was necessary to begin praying the evening prayer. And in the synagogue there became a [restlessness.?] The Rabbi is not yet here! One of the searchers passed by a poor courtyard.) You know they had courtyards there not like here;

(And passing by he sees the Rabbi crawls out from that courtyard. The Rabbi pulls himself bent over from the courtyard. Goes he over to him and says, "Rabbi, 9 what has happened to you? The whole town waits in Synagogue so late." Tells him the Rabbi, "I was going past to go to Synagogue and I heard a little child crying so strong with such pitifulness with such entreaty and laments mama, that I went in to see what there is doing. When I went into the house did I find a child alone in a cradle. Probably had her mother gone to Synagogue and had the child with no one to leave over and until I did the child put to sleep was I not able to come to Synagogue.") It's a story what the Chassidim used to tell the wonderful things of their Rabbi. The meaning of the story is why he found the child alone in the house. I told you before that everybody had run to shul and left the children at home. What they couldn't get over is that the Rabbi (had neglected the synagogue Yum Kippur at night to give care on a child. This is a small thing but if the Rabbi did this did it become a wonderful thing.)

They told me that (by me in the little town was a policeman) He was the policeman. He took care of the Shtettel (little town). He knew the Shtettel (little town) and he was there so long that (They called him by a Yiddish name. They called him Chemel. And when it began

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the unrest in Russia and it began the pogroms. And it began the revolutionary movement. It was an industrial town. They worked leather there. You can name the town. Who cares. It was in the Smargon. Smargoner, if they will read this, 11 will they recognize the story. And as in Russia was not allowed any gatherings, any meetings, they used to employ the agitation at a circumcision or at a wedding. There would they get together and there would they talk about the forbidden things. Well Chemel had this smelled out and he started to make raids on the circumcisions and weddings and he began to disrupt. He used to come and bring more police with him and scatter the whole wedding. He made arrests too. And in town were strong ones, you know heroes what held the town with strength.) You know controlled the town with their strength. Should I give you the right names.

(They can me sometimes came to complain. Who knows. Everybody knows them.)
Allright.

(There was Chyam the Porter, and Smulke the Tserip.) His great grandfather maybe had smallpox so it left marks on the face so they gave him the name Tserip. So all the children after that were called tseripis. So if anything happened (If they someone banged up the sides because he was a stool pigeon, did they say 12 it stems from Smulke the Tserip and Chyam the Porter, their gang. And one night did they take Chemel the Policeman and did dress him a sack on the head and did they pull him away in river. It was a winter night and the river was frozen and) they made a hole in the ice and (They did let him down with the sack on the head) And then somebody passed by and they heard him scream and he was taken out. And when they took him out he did not want to stay in that town any more. They sent another one and they sent also Cossacks to watch them. And that town was plenty tortured. They didn't let them alone. I knew Smulke the Tserip as a young boy. His family was well known. (from generation to generation were they reknown for heroes. Like you say. You could not spit in their soup.) They had a lot of nerve. When I was a young girl (used I to shiver before Smulke the Tserip. He used to stand in the middle of the street and mimic all the girls. This one has crookedfeet and this one wiggles 13 with her ass and this one like this) It impressed on me so much. I was afraid of him like from a pest. Once we

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went to the park so Smulke and his gang were sitting up a tree there and (he was singing a little song) A dirty song. I know the song sure but I'm not going to give it to you. Well it went like this, all right it's not so bad. (The Granny Rivele, she wants a man And makes herself nothing ashamed. She gives the story in dowry And nobody wants to take)

Like a bird he was sitting on the tree and as soon as he saw us (did he give a sing off. He had a knocked out little tooth in the front and he used to go around with sparkling eyes and whoever passed by used he to mimic and sing a little song.)

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FORM D Extra Comment

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Arnold Manoff

ADDRESS 27 Hamilton Terrace

DATE Oct. 17, 1938

SUBJECT YIDDISH FOLK SONGS— ANECDOTES & TALES (Gussie Simon)

The neighborhood in this part of the Bronx is one of the typical interlocking communities described in the interview with Bertha Dlugatch. It's shopping and cultural center is Burnside Ave. Two movie houses, a Woolworth's and the usual number of dress shops, shoe stores, millinery shoppes, one lamp shade and drapery store. As this section is further North and has not as yet suffered the infiltration of many reliefers and WPA workers, there is a noticeable air of respectability only occasionally marred by some struggling ground floor apartment business. The recent building boom filled such vacant

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lots as there were on and off the Grand Concourse with modern apartment buildings rents from 45 bucks for three rooms to 65 for the same and up. These houses are all in light tan brick with corner casement windows and some shrubbery planted around them on the sidewalk. The lobbies and the facades however are loaded with all the artistic inhibitions and frustrations of the architects or perhaps the landlords. Such lobbies! They are usually adorned with multi-colored mirrors, bright rugs, ultra modern lighting designs. Each one looks like the entrance to a movie house, specifically the arty little movie houses that are being built throughout the city. The Grand Concourse is the great promenade. Before and after the movies for romance, pick ups, idle walks, 2 bicycle riding. There is the usual pool room on Jerome Ave., which parallels the Concourse four blocks West of it and which houses all the more apparent vices of the Concourse communities by the fact that the West Side Subway runs overhead on Jerome Ave. and on this street rental values are lower, stores, fewer, cafeterias cheaper. On Jerome Ave. are to be found the garages and bars and coffee joints where the hackies congregate. Burnside Ave. has its elegant cafeteria for tired housewives. There are of course the poker and pinochle games but the desperation with which card playing is attended in the poorer neighborhoods is not too much in evidence here although occasionally you will find a jittery housewife who cannot pay her grocer because she lost last night. The language is still pronouncedly Yiddish American, Galician, Lithuanian and Polish accents mingling over the counters in the markets, butcher shops etc. More fur coats and pince nez to be seen and chubbier sleeker kids. There are quite a number of young married housewives who occupy the new Concourse Apartments. The difference from the Southernmost community to the Northernmost Community along the Concourse is altogether not very great, perhaps 1000 bucks a year annual income for each family. This neighborhood is in between the two. If politics can be considered an index; here the Democratic Party is first, American Labor second, and the others way down. The neighborhood has recently become slightly conscious politically and you can bank on one street meeting a week excluding election campaigns.

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Unfortunately, Mrs. Simon is not a typical resident of this neighborhood, living there by necessity rather than choice. She and her husband own a grocery store on the corner of Creston Ave. and 181st Street and they occupy a ground floor three room apt. for which they pay 38 dollars. a month. The material given 3 by Mrs. Simon will probably be familiar to people who know Yiddish folklore. The story about the Rabbi is one of the many old tales told by Religious Jews. The story about Smulke der Tserip is one like many, authentic of course, to be garnered from all Jews who fled the Czar's terror around 1902-7 and who were in one way another connected with the Bund or similar revolutionary movements of that time. In every Jewish community of old Russia there is to be found a story of one or more Jewish heroes who dumped the town policeman and in general belied the impression of complete passivity and breast beating to Heaven for succor. Mrs. Simon herself has had no schooling but in her early days in America she associated with the Yiddish intellectuals of the day. Ibsen and Chekov and Kropotkin were the rage then. Apparently she has been on the fringe of the socialist movement for some time since the war. She votes for the American Labor Party and remembers fondly when the now Judge Pankin was a wild haired orator on the East Side. She derives from peasant stock, worked in the needle trades before the war, has a smattering knowledge of music and literature. She is a good example of an imaginative, uneducated working class woman (despite the grocery store) who has never fully accepted American ideas and customs and never fully digested the ideas which surrounded her youth. She is an active member in a Ladies Auxiliary of The Workman's Circle, a large fraternal organization with slight socialist leanings.
